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STATE FOR NEA/MAG

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TAGS: PREL PTER PGOV PBTS MARR NATO AG WI MO
SUBJECT: MOROCCO: MFA OFFICIAL DISCUSSES ALGERIA, SAHARA
AND US MILITARY ASSISTANCE

REF: RABAT 814

Classified By: POLCOUNS Craig Karp for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Summary: During an unexpectedly wide-ranging pre-UNGA discussion, MFA International Security Chief Karim Halim (strictly protect) complained about "bumps" in the normally good security cooperation between Morocco and Algeria. Halim griped that the current level of USG military assistance to Morocco was "peanuts" given Morocco's "remarkable" level of partnership with the USG, including within NATO and the UN. He also asked the USG to be specific on what it wanted from Morocco on the Trans Sahara Counter Terrorism Partnership. Halim, who was expressing his personal views rather than official Moroccan policy, made some surprising criticisms of Morocco's current Western Sahara autonomy plan and its alleged representative council, the CORCAS and the Polisario, which he said was even more unrepresentative. He suggested the plan was not widely consulted and called for greater attention to Saharan tribal leaders. End Summary.

¶2. (C) During a recent meeting, ostensibly to discuss the upcoming Guantanamo Advisory Review Board session (Reftel), MFA Director-level Chief of International Security Affairs (our principal working level PM/and CT interlocutor) Karim Halim over the summer. He said that Algerian rhetoric blaming Morocco for allowing the weapons, explosives, and manpower to cross its borders, fueling the recent upsurge in Algerian terror attacks, had even affected "operational channels" normally characterized by cooperation. He ascribed the change to desperation and "scapegoating," and to Algeria's "Stalinist" political system. Halim griped that Algiers would always put short-term self-interest above rapprochement and regional priorities, even if, in the long term, such a strategy was not in Algeria's interests. In response to a question about Mauritania, he said cooperation and security on the Mauritanian border had not been affected by the recent coup. (Note: There are recent pres reports about ongoing Moroccan military assistance to Mauritania. End note.)

¶3. (C) Halim argued that Morocco had been a "good and sincere partner" to the USG, NATO and UN on issues of terrorism and regional security. In contrast, he found the level of USG military assistance was "peanuts" in comparison to the GOM's commitment and activity. He said that Morocco did not waiver when it came under fire from its Arab partners, who accused it of collaboration with Israel for signing on to NATO's Operation Active Endeavor in the Mediterranean. Halim added that Morocco has been helpful in the Forum for the Future initiative and has helped advance U.S. interests in the face of sometimes withering criticism. "We have made a deliberate and strategic decision to ally and orient ourselves with the West," he said, "but it's not always easy being a fault line." The GOM is grateful for the

Millennium Challenge Compact, he added, but still needed significant financial and technical assistance in the security sphere.

¶4. (S) Halim agreed that resolving the Western Sahara conflict was important for regional stability but said, "speaking personally and frankly, I don't support the autonomy plan. It's not workable." Halim explained that he is half Sahrawi and visits the territory often. He said that it was a point of pride among unionist Sahrawis that their votes were the key that put the ruling Istiqlal party in power in the 2007 parliamentary elections. However, he said that most "realistic" Sahrawis believe that tribalism is too great a force to make the autonomy plan, as currently constructed, viable. In his view, Morocco should continue its unilateral reform measures in the territory, and trust that progress will entice the refugees to return.

¶5. (S) Halim said that family and tribal ties are stronger than political ties in the south, which is why neither the Polisario (which is primarily made up of members of the Rgibat tribe) nor the Royal Consultative Council on Western Sahara (CORCAS) (which is weighted toward the Rgibat and Tekna tribes) could actually lead or build a consensus in an autonomous Sahara. "The Polisario does not represent me politically or tribally and neither does CORCAS head Khalihenna," he emphasized. "Morocco and the West" need to start talking to the Sheikhs (tribal leaders) now if they want a smooth transition later, he explained. He added that the greatest threat to stability lay with frustrated pro-polisario youth on both sides of the berm who might lose patience with the slow pace of progress and turn to violence.

¶6. (C) Comment: Halim is a long standing Embassy contact and has always been forthright in his communications. It is not clear if his comments on Moroccan and Algerian security cooperation are based on fact or personal frustration. Generally transcending their broader political bitterness, the long-standing cooperation between the security services nonetheless has been known to fluctuate. His doubts about Sahara autonomy versus a more direct integration may reflect those of many Sahrawis inside Morocco, some of whom hold important positions in the GOM. End Comment.

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